My husband builds furniture as a hobby, and he has apprenticed under some extraordinary woodworkers without ever leaving our Oregon home. No, these artisans didn’t make a special trip to our home just to teach him; instead, they have been teaching him through woodworking magazines and shows. The apprenticeship routine he follows varies little from month to month: As the monthly woodworking magazines arrive, he flips through the pages, reading like a woodworker, paying close attention to every piece of furniture pictured in the glossy pages, noticing an unusual overhang, an extraordinary cut, an unexpected taper (my untrained eye never seems to notice any of these details until he points them out to me). Then, he goes to the shop in the backyard, pulls some wood down from the shelf, and practices until he has mastered the new detail and has learned something new about the craft of woodworking. Knowing more about his craft gives him choices—choices that he can use the next time he makes a piece of furniture.

Students should learn about the craft of sentences the way my husband learns about the craft of woodworking; in both, the goal is to give us the flexibility necessary to express ourselves in the world (Larsen-Freeman 104). Looking at grammar from this perspective, then, asks us to think of it not as a “linguistic straitjacket” (103), a set of arbitrary rules, a collection of dos and don’ts, but as a “flexible, incredibly rich, system that enables proficient speakers to express meaning in a way appropriate to the context, to how they wish to present themselves” (117). With this in mind, then, we should use grammar instruction to make students aware of the stylistic options they have for various rhetorical occasions (Devet 14) so that they can develop their rhetorical competence. Grammar in that sense is equal to a writer’s style, representing “the choices an author made from the lexical and syntactical resources of the language” (Corbett 24) as well as the punctuation conventions chosen (Ehrenworth and Vinton 21).

This apprenticeship into grammar should always be presented in the context of reading and writing; years of research have made it clear that grammar taught in isolation does not contribute to the writing skills of students. Yet, it is also clear from the various articles and books recently published that thoughtful grammar instruction can lead to better, more effective writing if it is done in the context of reading and writing, with an eye toward connecting grammar to rhetorical and stylistic effects.

The Reading-Writing-Grammar Connection: A Preliminary (Unstructured) Approach

Reading for Grammar

Understanding the reading-writing-grammar connection proceeds in steps, just as apprenticing with
experienced woodworkers does: First, just as my husband looks closely at pictures of furniture, we too need to bring into the classroom “touchstone texts” (Ray 41), texts that help students see how accomplished writers have used their conscious understanding of language, their “power as writers, [to] make significant choices . . . at the sentence level” (Ehrenworth and Vinton 21). Our knowledge and understanding of sentence structure, then, guide us in helping students describe “what [they] see in beautiful texts” (Ray 21). In this way, they develop “a feel for the beauty of language, for its power and strength and grace” (Ehrenworth and Vinton 88).

### Writing “with” Grammar

Drawing on classical Greek practices, I encourage students to imitate artful sentences, to practice writing their own sentences based on well-crafted model sentences (Devet 14) just as my husband spends hours honing his skills on a particular woodworking detail. Pattern imitation helps writers create sentences—under careful guidance—that they would not necessarily create on their own, thus helping them expand their natural repertoire of syntactic constructions. Imitation is the first step toward giving writers choices that reflect their stylistic and rhetorical competence. It is not simply copying; rather, as Bonnie Devet has pointed out, it “instills patterns of thinking on which students can draw to create their own prose; it shows the infinite variety in syntax . . . it reunites grammar with rhetorical effect” (14).

We can imitate the mentor sentence. “It was a graceful, clean, neat, silent maneuver” (Paulsen 17) gives an unusual listing of adjectives—unusual because there is no *and* to join the last adjective and interrupt the flow, the tone of the piece. Imitation is particularly useful if we want to teach students about structures that do not appear in their spoken language, such as absolutes, zoom-in devices that typically appear in descriptive pieces: “But Aunt May *gardened*, and when she said it your mind would see some lovely person in a yellow-flowered hat snipping soft pink roses, *little robins landing on her shoulders*” (Rylant 9; italics in original, underlining added). Cynthia Rylant has taken her camera and is following Aunt May in her garden; using her zoom lens (the absolute construc-
tion), she directs our attention to the little robins that land on her shoulders—a powerful detail in the sentence.

Similarly, cleft constructions are unusual in routine speech, but they create a focal point in the sentence, establishing explicitly or implicitly a contrast with the surrounding text: “It isn’t fear that this bitter February darkness starts working up in my stomach. I never have been afraid of anything since I came to live on this mountain. It’s just lonesomeness” (Rylant 10–11; italics added). By using a cleft sentence, Rylant anticipates for us the contrast, which comes two sentences farther down: “It’s just lonesomeness.”

She could have given us the same meaning using a simpler, non-cleft sentence: “This bitter February darkness doesn’t start working up fear in my stomach. I never have been afraid of anything since I came to live on this mountain. It’s just lonesomeness.” What we’ve lost in this second sentence is the anticipation, the connection of the first sentence to the last one—the contrast between fear and lonesomeness.

Through sustained imitation, students internalize certain patterns of language, remember them as chunks and, ultimately, create a repertoire (Myers 613–14) that they can retrieve to create effective, eloquent sentences.

In other words, students have apprenticed through imitating mentor sentences and understanding how each part contributes to the overall stylistic effect, and they can now envision using these structures in their writing.

Students then make their writerly moves—using language in effective, stylistically elegant ways, to create sentences that “convey meanings that match [their] intentions” (Larsen-Freeman 105)—the same way my husband, after practicing for hours in his shop, knows exactly what each joint and each taper will do to the overall look of a piece.

Style Sheets: A Structured, Practical Approach

Stylistic Study I: Length

It is helpful to have a structured, practical way to show students how to read with an eye to sentence craft: read mentor texts to discover why the sentences are stylistically effective, read their peers’ writing to assess the stylistic features of the sentences, or read their own pieces to revise their constructions into well-crafted, powerful sentences. Style sheets, based on the work of Edward P. J. Corbett and Katie Wood Ray, give us a practical way of looking at “objectively observable features of style” (Corbett and Connors 369). Students can use them for a variety of purposes—to understand in specific ways the style of their favorite writer; to assess the style of their own sentences, even compare them with the style of their favorite writer; and to guide revision for sentence craftsmanship. The style sheet, following the model established by Corbett, consists of three relatively independent subsections, each dealing with a separate, observable feature of style: paragraph and sentence length, sentence analysis, and sentence openers (see fig. 1).

The first section (paragraph and sentence length) helps students understand what it means to read like a writer, paying attention to the way texts are constructed. Specifically, students are to look at sentence length because we want to encourage them to vary their length for stylistic effect. Short sentences move the action forward; long sentences are packed with information, take our breath away, give us excitement. But we also want to make them notice that there is a balance between long and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE 1. Stylistic Study I: Length</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words in the piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longest sentence (# of words)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortest sentence (# of words)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of sentences with more than 10 words over the average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of sentences with more than 10 words over the average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longest paragraph (in # of sentences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortest paragraph (in # of sentences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average paragraph (in # of sentences)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
short sentences—long sentences following short sentences and vice versa—in part to establish a rhythm.

Paragraph length obviously depends on genre, purpose, and audience for a piece; we expect newspaper and magazine articles to contain short paragraphs while textbooks—which include long, detailed explanations of new material—will have longer, denser paragraphs. We want to encourage students to vary their paragraph length—push the readers when appropriate but also give them room to breathe.

Stylistic Study II: Sentence Analysis
This section, divided into three parts, constitutes the heart of the style sheet since it asks students to focus on the form and craft of sentences (see fig. 2). As part of grammatical analysis, students are to zoom in on sentence construction, on the way a writer has chosen to present information. As students fine-tune their knowledge of spoken language and become more familiar with the written language and its conventions, we expect them to negotiate longer syntactic constructions. We know, for example, that as they get older, there is an increase not only in the length of their clauses (joining clauses with coordinating or subordinating conjunctions) but also in the type of dependent clauses used (“that” clauses appear earlier than relative clauses, for example).

Length, however, is not the only element students need to consider as they learn about sentences. It is also important to look closely at the craft of each sentence, the way it is constructed to seduce us; here, once again, Ray’s work is critical in helping students understand the choices writers have (see the examples in Section B of the style sheet in fig. 2).

Finally—and this seems particularly important now with a number of writing assessments focusing on syntactic fluency—students are asked to look at some constructions that are indicative of syntactic fluency and maturity. These include increase in the length and complexity of noun phrases—which can be accomplished through the use of adjectives, prepositional phrases, and appositives—as well as “tightening” or consolidation of constructions—participles and absolutes.

Stylistic Study III: Sentence Openers
Students report to me that, year after year, their teachers encourage them to “vary the way they begin their sentences,” without guidelines as to how this can be done. When asked, students tell me they simply try to begin each sentence with a different word! Most of them are surprised to see the different ways accomplished writers begin their sentences, often by breaking mythrules, “‘rules’ that rule no one” (Schuster xii), such as don’t begin sentences with and. As students become aware of the options they have, they realize that the overall coherence of their writing improves since they now can check their sentence openers to make sure the text flows (see fig. 3).

Done as part of reading a text, this stylistic analysis helps students analyze the stylistic effectiveness of a piece; done at the revision stage, it gives students concrete, specific ways to craft their sentences and improve the overall tone and voice of their writing. Understanding about sentences, then, gives them the power to choose how they want to convey their meaning, how to best say what they want to say.

Apprenticing in grammar is not all that different from my husband’s apprenticeship in woodworking. Years of careful observation have taught him that the slightest detail can make a difference in the aesthetic quality of a piece; years of practice, of apprenticing next to expert woodworkers, have taught him how to best craft a piece of furniture. And every month, he eagerly waits for his magazines so he can observe, inquire, and practice—so he can learn more about his craft.

Acknowledgments
I am indebted to Craig Hancock, Martha Kolln, and Ed Schuster for their helpful comments and encouragement during the July 2005 ATEG conference, where an earlier version of this article was presented; and to my husband, who continues to show me the importance of apprenticeship for craft.
**FIGURE 2. Stylistic Study II: Sentence Analysis**

**A. Grammatical Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Sentence</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of sentences</td>
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<td>Total number of simple sentences</td>
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<td>Percentage of compound sentences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of complex sentences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of mixed (compound-complex) sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of mixed sentences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of passive sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of passive sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B. Craft**

- **Repeating sentence or phrase structures**
  
  Later he would wonder about it, about how the thread in the nylon rope came to be hooked that way . . . . (Paulsen 34)

- **Runaway sentence** ("to convey a sense of fraticness, of desperation, of excitement or being carried away with something, writers will sometimes craft a very long, winding runaway sentence" [Ray 171])
  
  It was Monday, and Ob should have called me out of bed at five-thirty, but he didn’t, and when I finally woke at seven o’clock, it was too late to set the day straight. (Rylant 44)

- **See-saw sentence** ("[sentences] crafted with predictable pairs of information or detail; the pairing effect gives these sentences a two-part rhythm" [Ray 176])
  
  Joys are the same, and love is the same. Pain is the same, and blood is the same. (Ray 176)

- **Out-of-place adjectives**
  
  We’d . . . drink lemonade cold (Gray n. pag.)

- **Taffy sentences** ("These sentences begin with a central idea and then pull that idea out a little bit" [Ray 176])
  
  . . . and here his face was kind of lit up, kind of full of interest and sparkle. (Rylant 20)

**C. Syntactic Maturity**

- **Long, complex noun phrases**
  
  A wild wind—a wind stronger than anything he’d ever seen or heard of, a wind without warning out of the northwest. (Paulsen 35)

- **Participles (participial phrases or clauses)**
  
  She used to talk about her mommy and daddy watching over her after they died in the flash flood. (Rylant 14)

- **Appositives**
  
  And in that gray cast, that fog in which we both sat, I could see, and feel, that tears were rolling down his face. (Rylant 45)

- **Absolutes**
  
  For precious seconds he stood, the cut line of swells moving toward him . . . . (Paulsen 35)
FIGURE 3. Stylistic Study III: Sentence Openers

Subject

Dummy “it”—Extraposition (“It’s clear that . . .”)

Coordinating conjunction

Conjunctive adverb (however, moreover, in addition)

Verbal phrase (participle, infinitive)

Prepositional phrase

It-Cleft (“It was Mary who . . .”)

There

Works Cited


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The Writing Centers Research Project Survey for AY 2005–06

Beginning September 1, 2006, the Writing Centers Research Project (WCRP) will conduct its fourth biennial survey to collect benchmark data on writing centers. The WCRP requests that all writing center directors visit its Web site, http://www.wcrp.louisville.edu, and either complete the survey online or download a printable version to complete by hand. Participants may also request a hard copy of the survey.

Questions about the survey or requests for hard copies should be directed to Stephen Neaderhiser at senead01@louisville.edu or The Writing Centers Research Project, 312 Ekstrom Library, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292. Please complete the survey by Friday, October 20, 2006.